English Studies

ISSN: 0013-838X (Print) 1744-4217 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/nest20

# D.H. Lawrence, Knut Hamsun and pan

Peter Fjågesund

**To cite this article:** Peter Fjågesund (1991) D.H. Lawrence, Knut Hamsun and pan, English Studies, 72:5, 421-425, DOI: 10.1080/00138389108598770

**To link to this article:** http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00138389108598770

Published online: 13 Aug 2008.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 8

View related articles

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=nest20

**Download by:** [University of Exeter] **Date:** 31 May 2016, At: 02:37

# D.H. LAWRENCE, KNUT HAMSUN AND PAN

Once upon a time, D.H.Lawrence was simply revered as an English Moralist; today, he is rather seen as an English contributor to that turn-of-the-century wave of cultural criticism — far stronger on the European mainland than in England itself — of which the primary impulses came from Germany. The same winds from Germany also played over the mind of the Nobel-prize-winning novelist Knut Hamsun, and Lawrence knew and admired the Norwegian's work, with its obvious affinities with his own. The purpose of this essay is simply to explore one expression of this affinity: the memories of Hamsun's *Pan* that seem perceptible under the surface of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

It may be useful, however, first to examine more closely the significance of the Pan myth in *Lady Chatterley*. At a first glance, admittedly, there is precious little evidence of this to be found, for in the final version of the novel the only direct reference to Pan occurs towards the end, in Mellors's letter to Connie. Here he claims that people 'are all one-track minds nowadays. ... They should be alive and frisky, and acknowledge the great god Pan'.[1] Still, a somewhat closer reading will reveal a series of passages which no doubt have the Pan myth as their common denominator.

Firstly, and as is often the case in Lawrence, the name of a character is not wholly accidental. In the first two versions of the book, later published as *The First Lady Chatterley* and *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, the gamekeeper is called Oliver Parkin. Oliver means 'olive-tree', and in Greek mythology Pan is the protector 'particularly of the vine and olive'.[2] In Parkin's family background, there is further evidence of this connection. In *John Thomas and Lady Jane* there is a rather curious piece of information about Parkin's father. Talking to Connie about the gamekeeper's family, Mrs. Bolton, Clifford Chatterley's nurse, says: 'His father was Dicky Seivers, a cricketer, who went off all summer professional cricketing. Mrs. Seivers was only married to him a year ...'.[3] According to the Pan myth, Hermes is generally considered to be Pan's father, and 'the classic aspect of Hermes is that of an athlete-god', and he had 'the epithet *Agonios*, "who presides over contests"'.[4] Moreover, Pan was in the retinue of Dionysos, as were the Bacchantes, and in *John Thomas and Lady Jane* Clifford, looking at Connie's flashing beauty as she returns from the wood, says to her: 'You look like Bacchante just off to the hill, with the Iacchos! cry ready in your throat'.[5] And Iacchos, to complete the picture, is a mystic name for Dionysos.

[1] Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928; Harmondsworth, 1987), p. 312.
[2] *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (1959; London, 1987), p. 161.
[3] Lawrence, *John Thomas and Lady Jane* (1972; Harmondsworth, 1986), p. 198.
[4] *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*, p. 123.
[5] Lawrence, *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, p. 266.

*English Studies*, 1991, 5, pp. 421-425
0013-838X/91/05-0421/$3.00
© 1991, Swets & Zeitlinger



Downloaded by [University of Exeter] at 02:37 31 May 2016

In the final version, Connie's first reaction to Mellors also suggests that Lawrence had Pan in mind while writing the book. At the beginning of the novel Connie and Clifford are out in the wood, when Mellors suddenly appears. 'A man with a gun strode swiftly, softly out after the dog, facing their way as if about to attack them; then stopped instead, saluted, and was turning downhill. It was only the new gamekeeper, but he had frightened Connie, he seemed to emerge with such a swift menace. That was how she had seen him, like the sudden rush of a threat out of nowhere'.[6] Of Pan, similarly, it is said that he 'amused himself by giving the lonely traveller sudden frights, called for this reason panics'.[7]

In the final version, the most obvious references are played down slightly. The gamekeeper is called Mellors, and his father is given the rather more likely occupation of a miner. As already mentioned, however, this version contains, in Mellors's letter, the only direct reference to Pan.

It should also be mentioned that by the time Lawrence wrote *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, he had already made ample use of the Pan myth in other writings. In *The Plumed Serpent*, the novel which preceded *Lady Chatterley*, Cipriano, one of the main characters, was both the Mexican god Huitzlopochtli and Pan at the same time. And in the essay 'Pan in America', which Lawrence wrote in 1924 and which constitutes an excellent introduction to a reading of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, he pays an enthusiastic tribute to the great god which, in Christian tradition, was reduced to a devil, 'with the cloven hoofs and the horns, the tail, and the laugh of derision'.[8] Thus, Pan is a natural ingredient in Lawrence's *Umwertung aller Werte*: the god, which had been made into a devil, is again made into a god. In this essay Lawrence also goes on at some length about Pan and trees, and claims that 'I am conscious that [the contact with the tree] helps to change me, vitally. I am even conscious that shivers of energy cross my living plasm, from the tree, and I become a degree more like unto the tree, more bristling and turpentiney, in Pan'.[9] Similarly, in *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, 'Constance sat down with her book to a young pine-tree, that swayed against her like an animate creature, so subtly rubbing itself against her, the great, alive thing with its top in the wind'.[10] And Lawrence himself, of course, while writing the novel in the country outside Florence, frequently sat with his back to a trunk in 'a little wood of umbrella pines'.[11]

Thus the Pan myth was clearly both familiar and important to Lawrence during the last years of his life, and on this background it should come as no surprise that he would also pay attention to the way in which other writers

[6] Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, p. 49.
[7] *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*, p. 161.
[8] Lawrence, 'Pan in America', *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H.Lawrence*, ed. Edward D. McDonald (1936; London, 1967) p. 23.
[9] Ibid., p. 25.
[10] Lawrence, *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, p. 91.
[11] Harry T. Moore, *The Priest of Love: A Life of D.H.Lawrence* (1974; Harmondsworth, 1980), p. 532.



Downloaded by [University of Exeter] at 02:37 31 May 2016

made use of the same material. And this brings the discussion back to Knut Hamsun.

The novel *Pan* was published for the first time in 1894, and translated into English as late as 1920. This piece of information alone confirms the fact that Hamsun never really appealed to large numbers of English readers. As a cosmopolitan, however, Lawrence was clearly aware of the Norwegian writer's towering position on the Continent, particularly in Germany, where *Pan* had gone through eighteen editions by the time it was first translated into English. Thus, Lawrence may have read *Pan* in German before 1920. It is also interesting to note that he mentions another of Hamsun's works as early as May 1920. In a letter he says that he has seen the manuscript of a translation of '*Love's Tragedy* — by Knut Hamsun, 4 act — a famous thing, unknown in England'.[12] And the translator was Maurice Magnus, Lawrence's acquintance who committed suicide at Malta a few months later. The best documentation for Lawrence's interest in Hamsun, however, is offered by his Danish friend, the painter Knut Merrild, who stayed with Lawrence in Mexico. According to Merrild, the two of them had been discussing a number of Scandinavian writers, and during this conversation Lawrence claimed that he liked *Pan* the best of Hamsun's works.[13] Still, around the same time Lawrence wrote the essay called 'The Novel', in which *Pan* is also mentioned, and here he puts *Pan* in a bag among other 'pathetic or sympathetic or antipathetic little Jesuses ...'.[14]

However Lawrence viewed Hamsun's novel, the fact remains that *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which Lawrence wrote just a few years after he read *Pan*, contains an unusual number of parallels to the latter novel.

The settings have a number of characteristics in common. The action of *Pan* takes place in a small fishing village in the north of Norway during the summer of 1855. The local Tevershall is called Sirilund, where Herr Mack, the financially somewhat weatherbeaten merchant on whom the entire village depends, lives in a modest counterpart to Wragby. Herr Mack has a daughter, Edvarda, and she is courted by the Doctor, who — with a typical Hamsun touch — is limping, using a walking stick, and is taken in a carriage to spare his foot. Another suitor, brought to Sirilund by Edvarda's father, is a scientist from Finland, a thin and sickly baron, who quite effectively sums up Hamsun's heartfelt contempt for the men of his class and occupation. In this quiet village arrives Lieutenant Glahn, the narrator of the main part of the book. In the wood on the edge of the village, he rents a little cottage owned by Mack, in which he lives in deliberate isolation from the outside world. A hunter, he wears a rough leather dress and a gun slung over his shoulder, and roams the big forest shooting game together with his faithful companion, the dog Æsop. Glahn is a

[12] Lawrence, *The Letters of D.H.Lawrence*, eds. James T. Boulton and Andrew Robertson (Cambridge, 1984), III, 532.

[13] Knut Merrild, *With D.H.Lawrence in New Mexico: A Memoir of D.H.Lawrence* (1938; London, 1964), p. 88.

[14] Lawrence, 'The Novel', *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, ed. Bruce Steele (Cambridge, 1985), p. 182.



Downloaded by [University of Exeter] at 02:37 31 May 2016

mysterious character, and very little is revealed about him apart from his military rank and the fact that, at the end of his story, he is thinking about going to India or Africa.

So far, the general outline of Hamsun's and Lawrence's stories are remarkably similar. When it comes to the passionate relationship between Glahn and Edvarda, however, things take a rather different turn. But in both novels, the woman is drawn as if by a magnet to erotic encounters with the strange man in the wood. And on the more detailed level, there are several points that suggest an intimate connection between the two novels.

To start with, Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* has the same military rank as Glahn. He has also previously been to both India and Egypt, countries to which Glahn plans to go.

Then, the descriptions of the two men are similar. They are both embodiments of the god himself. In *Pan*, Edvarda tells Glahn: '"Do you know what my friend says about you?" she began. "Your eyes are like an animal's, she says, and when you look at her, it makes her mad".'[15] And in *The First Lady Chatterley*, Parkin 'stared down at Constance with his small-pupilled eyes like some animal that hunts'.[16]

Furthermore, when Glahn is leaving Sirilund, Edvarda asks him if she can keep his dog as a remembrance, and Glahn agrees. In *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, when Connie and Parkin are parting for the last time in the wood, the same question arises. Though the new gamekeeper is supposed to have Flossie, Connie wants to '"have her for a friend". ... "And if she's not happy, *I'll* take her". He pondered this for a time. "Ay!" he said. "If yer'd have her".'[17]

Still another parallel is found between Herr Mack and Clifford. The former shows an almost childish admiration for modern inventions. He proudly shows Glahn 'his new lamps; the first paraffin lamps to be seen so far north. They were splendid things, with a heavy leaden foot', and he talks enthusiastically about railways and the telegraph.[18] Clifford, likewise, is obsessed, particularly in the second version, with modern things. 'He bought a new car, and gave Connie the old one', and 'he would sit for hours vacant as an empty whelk-shell, listening to the radio'.[19]

Finally, compare the following passages:

> Often in the evening, when I came back to the hut after being out shooting all day, I could feel that kindly, homely feeling trickling through me from head to foot; a pleasant little inward shivering. And I would talk to Æsop about it, saying how comfortable we were. ... And when ... we had both fed, Æsop would slip away to his place behind the hearth, while I lit a pipe and lay down on the bench for a while, listening to the dead soughing of the trees. There was a slight breeze bearing down towards the hut, and I could hear quite clearly the clutter of a grouse far away on the ridge behind. Save for that, all was still.[20]

[15] Knut Hamsun, *Pan*, trans. W.Worster (Oslo 1894; London, 1920), p. 60.
[16] Lawrence, *The First Lady Chatterley* (New York, 1944; Harmondsworth, 1986), p. 73.
[17] Lawrence, *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, p. 329.
[18] Hamsun, p. 29.
[19] Lawrence, *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, p. 341.
[20] Hamsun, pp. 3-4.



Downloaded by [University of Exeter] at 02:37 31 May 2016

He went home with his gun and his dog, to the dark cottage, lit the lamp, started the fire, and ate his supper and bread and cheese, young onions and beer. He was alone, in a silence he loved. His room was clean and tidy, but rather stark. Yet the fire was bright, the hearth white, the petroleum lamp hung bright over the table, with its white oil-cloth. ... He sat by the fire in his shirt-sleeves, not smoking, but with a mug of beer in reach.[21]

As suggested already, however, the relationships between the lovers differ quite considerably in the two novels. In *Pan* the match is, in its own curious way, a relatively even one. At one moment Glahn shows Edvarda an air of arrogant superiority, and the next he licks 'a few blades of grass by the roadside' in humility and dispair.[22] And Edvarda is a similarly highly charged and unstable character. Consequently, there is a violent clash of personalities between the two, a clash which is too volcanic to result in a lasting relationship.

I am not suggesting that Lawrence used the entire framework of *Pan* as a basis for his own novel. Still, the similarities between the two works seem suggestive. As mentioned above these parallels can be divided into two main groups: both novels make a rather direct use of the Pan myth, and in addition there are a number of elements apart from this myth which indicate an influence from Hamsun's work to that of Lawrence. A third element, however, which further underlines this connection, is the fact that both writers describe the same malaise of modern civilisation, using the wonders of the industrialised world as symbols of decadence and corruption rather than progress. Similarly, they present the mysterious wood and the men in it as representatives of a primitive alternative. No wonder, then, that Lawrence liked *Pan* the best of Hamsun's works. In it, he clearly found both a diagnosis of the modern world and an evocation of a *pan*-theistic dream world which were largely indentical to his own.

University of Oslo

PETER FJÅGESUND

Downloaded by [University of Exeter] at 02:37 31 May 2016

[21] Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, p. 125.
[22] Hamsun, p. 81.